

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO
EASTERN DIVISION

FREDERICK E. JOHNSON,

Plaintiff,

v.

Civil Action 2:15-cv-86
Judge James L. Graham
Magistrate Judge Elizabeth P. Deavers

GARY C. MOHR, *et al.*,

Defendants.

ORDER and REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Plaintiff, Frederick E. Johnson, a state inmate who is proceeding with out the assistance of counsel, brings this action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, asserting claims arising out of prison disciplinary proceedings against him. This matter is before the Court for consideration of Plaintiff's Motions for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(1) and (2). (ECF No. 1 and 3.) Plaintiff's Motions for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* are **GRANTED**. (ECF Nos. 1 and 3.) Plaintiff is required to pay the full amount of the Court's \$350 filing fee. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1). Plaintiff's certified trust fund statement reveals that he currently possesses the sum of \$16.51 in his prison account, which is insufficient to pay the full filing fee. His application indicates that his average monthly deposits for the six-month period prior to filing his application to proceed *in forma pauperis* were \$84.50.

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1), the custodian of Plaintiff's inmate trust account (Inmate Id # A162-761) at Warren Correctional Institution is **DIRECTED** to submit to the Clerk of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Ohio as an initial partial payment,

20% of the greater of either the average monthly deposits to the inmate trust account or the average monthly balance in the inmate trust account, for the six-months immediately preceding the filing of the Complaint.

After full payment of the initial, partial filing fee, the custodian shall submit 20% of the inmate's preceding monthly income credited to the account, but only when the amount in the account exceeds \$10.00 until the full fee of \$350.00 has been paid to the Clerk of this Court. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2). *See McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601 (6th Cir. 1997).

Checks should be made payable to: Clerk, United States District Court. The checks should be sent to:

Prisoner Accounts Receivable
260 U.S. Courthouse
85 Marconi Boulevard
Columbus, Ohio 43215

The prisoner's name and this case number must be included on each check.

It is **ORDERED** that Plaintiff be allowed to prosecute his action without prepayment of fees or costs and that judicial officers who render services in this action shall do so as if the costs had been prepaid. The Clerk of Court is **DIRECTED** to mail a copy of this Order to Plaintiff and the prison cashier's office. The Clerk is further **DIRECTED** to forward a copy of this Order to the Court's financial office in Columbus.

This matter is also before the Court for the initial screen of Plaintiff's Complaint under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A to identify cognizable claims and to recommend dismissal of Plaintiff's Complaint, or any portion of it, which is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2); *see also McGore v. Wrigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 608

(6th Cir. 1997). Having performed the initial screen, for the reasons set forth below, it is **RECOMMENDED** that the Court **DISMISS** this action for failure to state claim upon which relief can be granted pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2).

I.

Congress enacted 28 U.S.C. § 1915, the federal *in forma pauperis* statute, seeking to “lower judicial access barriers to the indigent.” *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 31 (1992). In doing so, however, “Congress recognized that ‘a litigant whose filing fees and court costs are assumed by the public, unlike a paying litigant, lacks an economic incentive to refrain from filing frivolous, malicious, or repetitive lawsuits.’” *Id.* at 31 (quoting *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324 (1989)). To address this concern, Congress included subsection (e)¹ as part of the statute, which provides in pertinent part:

(2) Notwithstanding any filing fee, or any portion thereof, that may have been paid, the court shall dismiss the case at any time if the court determines that--

* * *

(B) the action or appeal--

(i) is frivolous or malicious;

(ii) fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted; or

28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) & (ii); *Denton*, 504 U.S. at 31. Thus, § 1915(e) requires *sua sponte* dismissal of an action upon the Court’s determination that the action is frivolous or malicious, or upon determination that the action fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted. *See Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470–71 (6th Cir. 2010) (applying Federal Rule of Civil Procedure

¹Formerly 28 U.S.C. § 1915(d).

12(b)(6) standards to review under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A and 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii)).

To survive a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim under Rule 12(b)(6) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, a plaintiff must satisfy the basic federal pleading requirements set forth in Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 8(a). Under Rule 8(a)(2), a complaint must contain a “short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). Although this pleading standard does not require “‘detailed factual allegations,’ . . . [a] pleading that offers ‘labels and conclusions’ or ‘a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action,’” is insufficient. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)). Further, a complaint will not “suffice if it tenders ‘naked assertion[s]’ devoid of ‘further factual enhancement.’” *Id.* (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 557). Instead, to survive a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim under Rule 12(b)(6) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, “a complaint must contain sufficient factual matter . . . to ‘state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.’” *Id.* (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570). Facial plausibility is established “when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Id.* In considering whether this facial plausibility standard is met, a Court must construe the complaint in the light most favorable to the non-moving party, accept all factual allegations as true, and make reasonable inferences in favor of the non-moving party. *Total Benefits Planning Agency, Inc. v. Anthem Blue Cross & Blue Shield*, 552 F.3d 430, 434 (6th Cir. 2008) (citations omitted). The Court is not required, however, to accept as true mere legal conclusions unsupported by factual allegations. *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678 (citing *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555). In addition, the Court holds *pro se* complaints “‘to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.’” *Garrett v. Belmont Cnty. Sheriff’s Dep’t*, No. 08-3978,

2010 WL 1252923, at *2 (6th Cir. April 1, 2010) (quoting *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972)).

II.

According to the Complaint, in July 2013, a fellow inmate accused Plaintiff of sexual assault, an accusation that ultimately resulted in the filing of a conduct report and disciplinary proceedings against him. In this action, Plaintiff asserts due process claims arising out of these disciplinary proceedings. In support of his due process claims, Plaintiff maintains that his rights were violated because he was denied certain protections afforded by the rules and procedures governing the prison's disciplinary process. More specifically, Plaintiff alleges that the investigation was improper leading to a false conduct report, that he was denied the opportunity to call witnesses, that he was denied the opportunity to review camera footage, and that he was denied the right to take a lie detection test. Plaintiff alleges as a result of the disciplinary proceedings, he was transferred to a maximum security segregation unit within the prison, where he has been serving for more than a year. In terms of relief, Plaintiff seeks declaratory relief, monetary damages, and a Court order requiring the disciplinary board to reverse their decision.

Plaintiff's due process claims fail because he has failed to identify a constitutionally protected liberty interest that the prison disciplinary proceedings implicated. *See Wilkinson v. Austin*, 545 U.S. 209, 221 (2005) (“[T]he Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause protects persons against deprivations of life, liberty, or property; and those who seek to invoke its procedural protection must establish that one of these interests is at stake.”). “An inmate establishes a liberty interest when a change in conditions of confinement ‘imposes atypical and significant hardship on [him] in relation to the ordinary incidents of prison life.’” *Williams v. Lindamood*, 526 F. App’x 559, 562 (6th Cir. 2013) (quoting *Sandin v. Conner*, 515 U.S. 472,

484 (1995)). “To determine whether changed conditions are ‘atypical and significant,’ a reviewing court considers both the duration and the nature of the more restrictive confinement relative to ‘prison norms and to the terms of the individual’s sentence.’” *Id.* (quoting *Harden–Bey v. Rutter*, 524 F.3d 789, 792–93 (6th Cir. 2008)).

In the present case, Plaintiff alleges that he has been placed in a maximum security segregation unit within the prison for more than a year as a result of the disciplinary proceedings. Plaintiff’s transfer to a maximum security segregation unit within the same prison, alone, does not suffice to implicate a constitutional liberty interest. *See Wilkinson v. Austin*, 545 U.S. 209, 222–23 (2005) (“[T]he Constitution itself does not give rise to a liberty interest in avoiding transfer to more adverse conditions of confinement.”); *Meachum v. Fano*, 427 U.S. 215, 228 (1976) (no due process violation arising from transfer to a maximum-security prison because “[c]onfinement in any of the State’s institutions is within the normal limits or range of custody which the conviction has authorized the State to impose”). Plaintiff has not identified any “atypical or significant hardships” arising from his placement within the prison’s maximum security segregation unit sufficient to create a liberty interest. *See Bradley v. Evans*, No. 98-5861, 2000 WL 1277229, at *5–7 (6th Cir. Aug. 23, 2000) (holding that fourteen months in administrative segregation did not constitute an atypical and significant hardship). Indeed, Plaintiff’s Complaint fails to set forth any allegations concerning how the conditions of his confinement have changed in light of his placement in maximum security. In the absence of such allegations, the Undersigned finds that Plaintiff’s Complaint fails to allege a viable due process claim.

III.

For the reasons set forth above, it is **RECOMMENDED** that the Court **DISMISS** this

action for failure to state claim upon which relief can be granted pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2). The Clerk is **DIRECTED** to send a copy of this order to the Ohio Attorney General's Office, 150 E. Gay St., 16th Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215.

PROCEDURE ON OBJECTIONS

If Plaintiff seeks review by the District Judge of this Report and Recommendation, he may, within fourteen (14) days, file and serve on all parties objections to the Report and Recommendation, specifically designating this Report and Recommendation, and the part in question, as well as the basis for objection. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). Response to objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days after being served with a copy. Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b).

Plaintiff is specifically advised that the failure to object to the Report and Recommendation will result in a waiver of the right to *de novo* review by the District Judge and waiver of the right to appeal the judgment of the District Court. *See, e.g., Pfahler v. Nat'l Latex Prod. Co.*, 517 F.3d 816, 829 (6th Cir. 2007) (holding that "failure to object to the magistrate judge's recommendations constituted a waiver of [the defendant's] ability to appeal the district court's ruling"); *United States v. Sullivan*, 431 F.3d 976, 984 (6th Cir. 2005) (holding that defendant waived appeal of district court's denial of pretrial motion by failing to timely object to magistrate judge's report and recommendation). Even when timely objections are filed, appellate review of issues not raised in those objections is waived. *Robert v. Tesson*, 507 F.3d 981, 994 (6th Cir. 2007) ("[A] general objection to a magistrate judge's report, which fails to specify the issues of contention, does not suffice to preserve an issue for appeal . . .") (citation omitted)).

Date: February 11, 2015

/s/ Elizabeth A. Preston Deavers

Elizabeth A. Preston Deavers
United States Magistrate Judge